1: Melamid K-4 (no date) 1953 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4 •
Qatar MK3

and their subjects, assisted by the occasional vigilance of British cruisers and sloops, piracy ceased, and since the 1840's the coast (except for Qatar) has been known as the "Trucial Coast," and the sheikhdoms collectively as "Trucial 'Oman," though there exists no political connection between the sheikhdoms of the coast and the sultanate of Muscat and 'Oman to the east.

Slave trading in natives of the coast, other Arabs, and Africans, and also gunrunning, long a subsidiary occupation, became predominant after the establishment of the maritime truce. Before the end of the nineteenth century Great Britain was forced to make another series of treaties with the sheikhs outlawing these practices.[5] In return for small subsidies, the sheikhs were prohibited from granting concessions for mining operations or bunkering stations to nationals of other states except with the approval of the British government. Further, British officials stationed in the area of the Persian Gulf obtained the right to supervise any foreign nationals entering or residing in the area of the sheikhs. These clauses were supposed to guarantee Great Britain against the threatened acquisition of bases by France, Russia, and Germany, which would have disturbed British naval dominance in the Indian Ocean. By means of these treaties the sheikhdoms of the Persian Gulf became virtual British protectorates in all matters of international concern, but without British military occupation or civilian administration. The British Indian rupee gradually became the currency in use along the coast; in the interior the Maria Theresa dollar is more acceptable.

In accordance with the policy of nonintervention in internal affairs, Great Britain recognizes no boundaries between the sheikhdoms. Trucial sheikhs are therefore able to attack and absorb one another's territory without restriction, and, similarly, new Trucial sheikhdoms can emerge if they agree to the provisions of the treaties. For example, the 1820 agreement was signed by eight local sheikhs (exclusive of the sheikh of Bahrein, signing for Qatar), but only six were left to sign the 1835 treaty. In 1914, only five sheikhdoms were reported to exist,[6] and today the number seems to be seven Trucial sheikhdoms and one sheikhdom, Fujaira, outside the Trucial treaties (Table I). The fate of the vanished sheikhdoms is unknown. As Sir Percy Cox[7]

[5] It should be noted that these treaties refer only to the external relations of the region. Therefore slavery of natives is exclusively subject to local law and custom and is independent of the treaty relation with Great Britain. Several recent reports mention the existence of slavery in the region but without citing definite cases. Nothing is known of the extent of the slavery, its conditions, or its economic importance.

[6] For example, in Peace Handbooks, Vol. 13, Foreign Office, Historical Section, London, 1920, p. 43.

[7] Some Excursions in Oman, *Geogr. Journ.*, Vol. 66, 1925, pp. 193–227; reference on p. 200.

2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4

to the majority of professing Christians. If an easy acceptance of poor and insanitary living conditions is one of the major faults of this race, as I believe it is, then such a shortcoming is easily counterbalanced by their innumerable virtues, which are seldom found in practice amongst Englishmen.

I have not had the opportunity to make a deep study of social problems in Arabia, but from my interpretation of what I have seen, I should not hesitate to lay the blame for the vices and backwardness of Arab life on the system of government which obtains in most regions. In principle it is comparable with the feudal system in Europe. Apart from the Bedouin country, where life is migratory and the tribes are tent-dwellers, the majority of Arabs are concentrated in the fertile valleys, where they can obtain water for their livestock and crops. In Oman, as in other parts of the continent, the coastal areas are ruled by paramount sheikhs, whose power is absolute and who are sometimes elected by their subjects, but who are more generally appointed by succession, the kingdom thus remaining in the hands of one family. Although many of these princely families are quite ancient, and have provided rulers for different sheikhdoms for centuries, it is not unusual to find one sheikh deposing another by force. Jealousy and a greed for more territory and power are frequently the root cause of tribal wars.

There is little that is democratic in the government of a sheikhdom. Through his judges and ministers, who are paid out of the royal purse, the sheikh administers justice. Often it is the justice of a tyrant, although some sheikhs are just and kindly and are regarded by their subjects more as 'fathers of the people' than as kings. All land belongs to the sheikh, who is theoretically custodian for his tribe, and he exacts revenues from merchants, shopkeepers, fishermen, pearling-fleet owners and merchants, camel breeders and farmers, in the form of a commission on all business, in addition to heavy taxes on the inhabitants of the towns and villages. There are, too, taxes on land and property, on fishing and pearling rights, and profits are even obtained from the sale (illegal and contrary to the treaties with the British Government, but still indulged in) of slave labour.

Apart from the pearling industry, one of the richest sources of income in Arabia is from the date plantations, and these, if not actually owned by the sheikhs, at least provide him with a handsome additional income. In recent years the Arab rulers have been considerably enriched by large sums paid for concessions by the oil

ment of 'the hooks'. A thief condemned to this terrible sentence may well blench. He is dropped from a high wall or tower on to sharp hooks which project from the wall. With his limbs securely skewered, he is left hanging in the pitiless sun until the vultures end his misery, leaving a whitened skeleton as a warning to wantons. Influential prisoners are cast into the palace dungeons without light or food, and garrotted quietly in the night by their gaolers. Branding and flogging are also common forms of punishment in Arabia.

A fair amount of desert raiding is still carried on in the Jebel Shamailiyah district, the range of mountains between Oman and Muscat, and at Sinash, a lonely town in the hills, the *Wali*, or Sultan's Viceroy, has been obliged to use draconian means of dealing with brigands, who sometimes resort to ransom and are a menace to peaceful merchants who use the pass. Not long ago one of the Sultan's brothers was abducted and carried off into the hills. The ransom demanded—a heavy one—was paid, but a year later the ringleader and several of his men were caught by the Sultan's trackers. They suffered some unpleasant tortures before they were finally put out of their sufferings by being hanged. Their property was confiscated and their unfortunate relatives were obliged to pay several time the amount of the ransom. Crime does not pay in Arabia, unless you are on the winning side. Yet the bandit and the camel raider persist in their vocations in spite of all discouragement. The Arab is prepared to fight—to the death, if necessary, for that which he steals, and this is a spirit which all Arabs admire.

Young Arab boys and girls, as well as slaves and Persian servants, are sometimes carried off by the raiders, and at one time I was obliged to provide an armed guard for the Fort bearers, as they were terrified to return to Sharjah at night, a distance of one mile, unless accompanied. Haider, my personal bearer, a youth of fifteen, told me that he had once been attacked at night, and for a time I allowed him to sleep in one of the mess rooms. High prices are fetched in the slave market for young people, who are sold to merchants or pearling fleet owners and treated little better than negro slaves. A fifteen years old Persian boy may fetch as much as 2,000 rupees, and a girl about 1,500. Negroes fetch only half this amount. The British authorities are aware that a traffic in slaves is carried on in Oman, but claim that they have been unable to obtain any evidence of it. Since I have met slaves who complained to me that they had been abducted and sold in the market, and once

2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4

paid a secret visit to the slave market at Baraimi, I consider this to be a very poor excuse. If it is too much to ask the Political Officer to investigate the slave traffic, it is surely not beyond the powers of the Indian Government to employ confidential agents who could obtain all the evidence they needed.

An exceptionally bad case came before the Political Officer in 1944. A sickly and emaciated Persian, of about thirty years of age, came to his office one day and told a remarkable story. This man stated that he had been a merchant at Dubai and had dealt in carpets and pearls. In 1939 he was travelling on foot between Dubai and Sharjah, and had about 2,000 rupees' worth of pearls on him, as well as some rupee notes, representing the day's takings. He was suddenly set upon by a band of raiders, who tied him with ropes to a camel, and rode off into the desert. He was cast into a filthy room in some distant town, badly treated and beaten, and eventually sold in the slave market. His owner was a brute, who beat and half-starved him, and a year later he was sold to a merchant on the coast near Bahrain. He worked in this man's house and was cruelly treated, being placed in chains for the slightest offence. Eventually he escaped, took refuge in the house of a Persian merchant, who gave him some money and advised him to make his way back to Sharjah and report the matter to the British authorities.

The Political Officer listened sympathetically to his story, and promised to report the case to the British Resident at Bahrah. He admitted to me afterwards, however, that there was little that the authorities could do. The man seemed to have no evidence of his capture and enslavement; he could not identify his captors, and could not even prove that he had the pearls or money on him at the time of his capture. To the best of my belief nothing was done in the matter; the poor wretch received no compensation, and was obliged to return to Persia penniless. Yet there were portions of his story which could easily have been corroborated, and the marks on his legs where he had been kept in chains were sufficient evidence of his treatment.

A few days after the attack on the medical camp, we heard that a similar attack had been made on the American encampment. Major Raimer, the commanding officer, had placed extra guards around the camp following the first attack, and one of these guards, a tough Chicagoan, thought he saw a figure creeping round the wire. He fired his Tommy-gun and was startled by the scream

2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4

so as to form a nest. Some pearl dealers keep as many as forty-five nets, graduated according to their perforations. The weighing of pearls is a most complicated matter, but very simply a pearl is rated in *chaus*, a Bombay measure, which is one three hundred and thirtieth part of a *maskal*, which is made up in turn by 100 *dokras*. A *chau* is really a unit of value as well as a weight, and changes according to the number of pearls being valued together. Thus, two pearls, weighing exactly half a third of a pearl, would not be estimated so highly in *chaus* as the single pearl. The finest pearl I saw in Jam Shan's collection was valued at £8,000, or nearly £75 a *chau*.

If the valuation of pearls is a complicated affair the financial organization of the industry is even more so. The industry teems with merchants, brokers, middlemen, agents, and moneylenders. First the pearl fleet has to be financed before it can go to sea, and money has to be provided for the crews and divers. This is advanced partly by the owners of the boats and partly by a special class of moneylenders called *Musaqqams*, who demand ten or twenty-five per cent interest. Every boat is commanded by a captain, or *Nakhuda*, who receives a percentage of the catch; sometimes he is the owner of the boat. Next in importance to him is the *Ghasah*, or diver, followed by the *Siyub*, or hauler, the *Radhif*, or extra hand, and the *Walaid*, or apprentice, whose duty it is to catch fish, cook, look after the pipes and coffee, and attend to other minor duties.

The *ghasah*, whose only work is to dive, are mostly poor Arabs and free negroes or slaves, and their efficiency depends more on their skill and daring than on the strength of their constitution. A slave diver who is not afraid to enter deep and muddy water containing weeds is ordinarily valued at considerably over a thousand rupees. The *siyub*, whose duties are merely to manage the boat and to lower and pull up the divers, are usually landsmen whom age or other causes have obliged to abandon diving. The total crew of a pearl boat varies from ten to forty men, the average number being sixteen. All sorts of boats are used for pearling, even jollyboats being fitted out for the purpose, but the majority are sambuks, batils, bagarahs and shuais. A large boat, holding forty men, will cost 30,000 rupees or more to construct and fit out.

There are two principal seasons for pearl diving: the *Ghaus-al-Bard*, or cold-diving season, which lasts from April to May, and the *Ghaus-al-Kabir*, or 'great diving', beginning in June after the end

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CHAPTER XVI

IN February, 1945, the British Resident of the Gulf, Sir Geoffrey Prior, called a conference of the Trucial sheikhs at Baraimi. Baraimi was chosen as the site for the 'durbar' because it is in neutral territory and is practically the only part of Oman over which none of the sheikhs has suzerainty. It lies at the base of the Trucial political division, and is the meeting place of all the main caravan routes from Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sohar (on the Gulf of Oman side of the peninsula) and Ras-al-Khaimah. Roughly ninety miles south-east of Sharjah, Baraimi, which lies in the middle of a large oasis, is geographically the north-eastern extremity of the great Rub-al-Khali desert. It was from here that I began my journey into that desert later in the year.

For centuries Baraimi has been a centre of the slave trade; lying as it does between the western and eastern coasts of the peninsula, the terminus of the main Oman caravan routes, it is ideally situated for this purpose. In the heyday of the slave traffic, slaves were brought here by ship either from Abu Dhabi or Sohar. The former port was used more extensively towards the end of the nineteenth century, since the suppression of piracy by British gunboats forced the Arab dealers to lie low in the Persian Gulf until they could unload their cargoes.

To-day, there is no direct importation of negro slaves from the African coasts, but a secret traffic exists in the sale of young ex-slaves, negroes and Persians, who are abducted by raiding Bedouins from the villages and towns. These unfortunates are taken to Baraimi, over which territory the British Government has no treaty rights, and are sold in the open market. There is no fixed day for these sales, the dates often being changed or delayed for days and weeks, in order to delude any officials or Government agents who may be in the vicinity. The Political Officers and Indian Government officials with whom I discussed the matter categorically denied that there was a traffic in slaves, but I had evidence to the contrary and determined to find out for myself what truth there was in the stories I had heard.

2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4

567 The Khan Bahadur Abdur bin Razzak, who employed business and political agents throughout Oman, had assured me quite emphatically that his men had attended sales of slaves at Baraimi; unfortunately they had been unable to procure either the names of the dealers or the buyers, and in the eyes of the British law this did not constitute evidence. On the other hand, there was the case of the Persian merchant (related elsewhere in this book) who was abducted by Bedouins at Dubai and taken into captivity, where he remained as a slave until his escape in March, 1945. The facts of his incarceration were placed before the Political Officer, Captain Bird, and no doubt a full report of the case will be found in the archives of the Government of India.

I have interviewed a number of ex-slaves in Dubai and Sharjah, who confessed that they had been bought by their present masters from the slave market. As a rule, however, the buyers come from other parts of Arabia, generally from Qatar and the Bahrain side of the coast, as the dealers are anxious to get their human wares out of Oman as quickly as possible. Whilst awaiting their disposal and transportation from the Trucial Coast, these wretched creatures are kept in filthy dungeons in Baraimi, or else in the open desert where there is no likelihood of their being traced.

High prices are still paid for slaves and there is little doubt that the sheikhs connive at the trade, although they are only too ready to protest to the authorities if any of their subjects are abducted. The chief agents of the slave traffic are the Bedouin tribesmen, who are feared by the sheikhs, so that even if the latter wished to stop the trade they could only do so by uniting and waging a protracted war against the *Badu*.

648 567 The difficulty facing the British (or Indian) Government in this matter is that Treaty rights extend to the coast of Trucial Oman only, and not to the interior, and Baraimi is neutral ground for which no one will claim responsibility. The site—it is scarcely a town—is largely inhabited by nomadic tribes of Bedouins, and is a noted refuge for the harbouring of criminals and desperate characters. Nothing less than an expedition and the establishment of a permanent police post would serve to abolish the slave market, and this could be done only if the British Government declared the Trucial Coast a Protectorate. It is extremely unlikely that such a step will be taken. Throughout the Middle East the Arab world is in a state of political ferment and, given the slightest provocation, the tribes might at any time unite and declare a 'Holy War' against

2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4

British and foreign influence in Palestine, Trans-Jordan, Iraq and Arabia. 567 648

To seize a part of Arabia and declare it to be under the political protection of the British Empire would, according to my information, give the Arab League and its satellite organizations justifiable reasons for demanding full and unequivocable Arab independence in every country in the Middle East. As most political students of the Arab question are aware, the Jewish situation is a mere pawn in the political game, a bargaining point which the malcontents are using to obtain world sympathy and to give them a valid excuse for furthering their political aims. It is reasonable to suppose, therefore, that the Socialist Government will pursue the *laissez-faire* policy of its predecessors and leave the Trucial Oman Coast in its present state of impoverishment and degradation. And the slave trade will continue.

On behalf of British rule in the past, it must be said in all fairness that in the last century the Government played a principal part in the repression of the traffic, and nowhere more so than on the East African coast and in south-west Asia. In the old days it was vastly different. For example, on board the fleet which in 1626 conveyed Sir Dodmore Cotton, a British Ambassador with his staff from Surat to Bundar Abbas, there were more than three hundred slaves bought by Persians in India, and the only remark which this circumstance suggested to Sir Thomas Herbert, the chronicler of the embassy, was that 'ships, besides the transporting of riches and rarities from place to place, consociate the most remote regions of the earth by participation of commodities and of other excellencies to each other'. 567

In 1772, however, it was decided by the English courts that a slave, as soon as he set his foot on the soil of the British islands, became free; but the slave trade and the owning of slaves continued abroad under the British flag until a much later date. In 1790, out of some 74,000 slaves exported annually from Africa, not less than 38,000 belonged to British merchants. In 1811 an Act was passed declaring the traffic in slaves to be felony and was made punishable by transportation. In 1833 proprietory rights in slaves was abolished throughout the British dominions, but the final liberation of all slaves did not take place until August, 1838, the transition having been effected, in most places, by means of a period of indentured apprenticeship.

Slavery in the Persian Gulf has been regarded as a prerogative

2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4

567 of Arab merchants returning from Zanzibar for centuries, and they did not take kindly to British anti-slave laws. In 1822 a treaty was concluded with the Sultan of Muscat, Saiyid Sa'id, which prohibited the sale of slaves to Christian nations by the Saiyid's subjects, and empowered the British Government to establish a British agent in the Saiyid's dominions in East Africa to watch the trade and seize any Omani vessels found carrying slaves to Christian countries.

Great opposition was met from the sheikhs of Trucial Oman, for the prohibition is said to have cost the Sultan of Muscat alone 100,000 dollars a year. To the Mohammedan population, by whose religion slavery was lawful and who had come by long custom to depend on a regular supply of slaves, it was anathema.

British reconnaissance of the Gulf and Aden Sea continued throughout the century, but with little success. In 1856 the corvette *Falkland* cruised against slavers in the outer Gulf between Jask and Sohar, with moderate success, but slaves continued to reach the Persian coast higher up in larger numbers. In 1860 it was estimated by Brigadier-General Coghlan that about 4,000 slaves were carried away every year from Africa to Arabia and the Persian Gulf, but the Political Officer at Zanzibar put the figure as high as 10,000.

The Times of India of October, 1872, contained the following description of a slave vessel taken by the *Vulture*:

'The number of slaves it was impossible at the time to estimate; so crowded on deck, and in the hold below was the dhow, that it seemed but for the aspect of misery, a very nest of ants. The hold, from which an intolerable stench proceeded, was several inches deep in the foulest bilge-water and refuse. Down below there were numbers of children and wretched beings in the most loathsome stages of smallpox and scrofula of every discription. A more disgusting and degrading spectacle of humanity could hardly be seen, whilst the foulness of the dhow was such that the sailors could hardly endure it. When the slaves were transferred to the *Vulture* the poor wretched creatures were so emaciated and weak that many had to be carried on board, and lifted for every movement. How it was that so many survived such hardships was a source of wonder to all that belonged to the *Vulture*.

'On examination by the surgeon it was found that there were no less than thirty-five cases of smallpox in various stages; and

2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4

from the time of the first taking of the dhow to their landing at Butcher's Island, Bombay, fifteen died out of the whole number of 169, and since then there have been more deaths amongst them. But perhaps the most atrocious piece of cruelty of the Arabs was heard afterwards from the slaves themselves; viz., that at the first discovery of smallpox amongst them by the Arabs, all the infected slaves were at once thrown overboard, and this was continued day by day until, they said, forty had perished in this manner. When they found the disease could not be checked, they simply left them to take their chance, and to die. Many of the children were of the tenderest years, scarcely more than three years old, and most of them bearing marks of the brutality of the Arabs in half-healed scars and bruises inflicted from the lash and stick.'

Mildness was not a characteristic of the conditions under which the Gulf was at this time supplied with slaves; on the contrary, the methods of the exporters from Africa appear to have been characterized by a barbarity equal to that of their compeers in any part of the world, including the Germans of the present century.

The exporters of slaves to the Persian Gulf were mostly Arabs, who were accustomed to proceed to Zanzibar for the purpose of legitimate trade during the north-eastern monsoon, that is, between November and February, and who generally returned, bringing slaves, either just before or just after the south-west monsoon, that is, in the months of April, May and June. The distance from Zanzibar to Sur is about 2,500 miles, and the voyage normally took from sixteen to twenty-five days.

The slave trade continued until 1907, the demand being high; good children fetched 120 dollars, male adults 150 dollars, and girls 200 to 300 dollars each. In 1901, 1,000 slaves were landed at Sur, but as a result of the firm policy of the British Government, who inflicted heavy fines and imprisonment on slave-traders and even sheikhs, the trade from Africa gradually abated, thanks to the work of Sir Percy Cox, the British Resident at Bushire.

It must not be assumed, however, that slavery has been entirely abolished in Arabia, even in that part which is administered by the Government of India, and it is known to flourish in the dominions of King Ibn Saud and the Yemen. Negro slaves (in many cases the descendants of persons exported from Africa earlier in the century), may still be seen in the houses of the sheikhs and merchants

567 of the Trucial Oman Coast, whilst a great many are employed in the fishing and pearl diving industries.

On one occasion I was talking to a young slave in the establishment of a rich pearl merchant of Dubai. I said to him, when we were alone: 'I suppose your father was an ex-slave who was in service here?' To my surprise he confessed that he had been with his present master only for four years, had been purchased in the Baraimi slave market for 500 rupees, and was born in Zanzibar, whither he had been abducted by Arab merchants when four years old and smuggled into the Hadramaut.

There are numerous records of slave traffic in the early days of this century. In August, 1901, a slave girl was imported by sea from Ras-al-Khaimah to Sharjah, where she was manumitted and a fine of seventy dollars was recovered. In 1904 two cases came to light of the sale at Umm-al-Quwain of boys kidnapped by Baluchis from the opposite coast; in each case the buyer was fined a hundred dollars and was sentenced to a term of imprisonment. On 5th September, 1901, two slaves obtained their freedom on board H.M.S. *Sphinx* at Dalmah Island. They stated that they had been kidnapped from Africa three years before and brought to Sur, whence two years later they had been re-exported to Sharjah. The last case illustrated the well-known fact that the condition of slaves in the Persian Gulf is not a hard one in these times, except in so far as they are employed by their masters for pearl-diving, and that on the Arabian coast it is generally the fear of being sent to sea that drives slaves to abscond.

Slaves are on the whole fairly well treated, often receiving pay as well as their food and quarters, and many slaves prefer serfdom to a life of competition in which they must work hard in order to obtain the bare necessities of life. I make no apology for slavery, which should be abolished in all countries under the British flag, but the fact remains that some slaves even refuse their freedom when it is offered to them and are extremely attached to their masters. The sons of Sultan bin Saqr, Sheikh of Sharjah, all have little slave attendants of their own age, and they are very fond of them. They are not beaten and are allowed to play with their young masters and share most of their privileges.

It has been estimated by Government of India authorities that at least 3,000 slaves have obtained their freedom with British assistance in the last fifty-five years, either on their way to or in the Persian Gulf; and to these must be added the vast but uncertain

2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4

number whose exportation from their native countries has been altogether prevented by British naval and other measures.

I have been informed that a regular slave market also exists at the small town of Harfit, as well as at Baraimi, the former being a region owned jointly by the Sultan of Muscat and the Sheikh of Abu Dhabi, although it is too far from the Sultan's seat to make the enforcement of police measures feasible. Several official delegations have been despatched to Baraimi and Harfit in the past to investigate the slave trade, but the Bedouins, who are the principal slave dealers, have a highly-developed intelligence service and long before the approach of any foreigner or political agent the slaves are concealed and the market closed. This deception makes it extremely difficult to obtain any direct evidence. When taxed with the matter, the sheikhs will deny most emphatically that the importation or sale of slaves takes place in their territories.

One sheikh, who was charged a few years ago with aiding and abetting the dealers, went so far as to admit that slaves were imported by Bedouins from Oman proper into the Trucial Oman Coast by caravan. It has also been reported that numbers of slaves are exported to Qatar by sea, but this has not been verified.

On the occasion of Sir Geoffrey Prior's visit to Baraimi, mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, I informed him that I suspected that a slave market existed there and asked if I could accompany him on his journey. Unfortunately, he declined, and I was very disappointed at the time, for not only had I wished to investigate for myself the tales of slave-dealing in this district, but I also desired to be present at the 'durbar', since it is very seldom that all the principal sheikhs and headmen of the Trucial Oman Coast can be met together. At first it was decided that the sheikhs should meet at the Fort and, after some refreshment, repair to Baraimi by car, but Mohammed bin Ali and several other sheikhs were averse from coming to the camp, and the meeting place had to be changed to Baraimi itself.

Not long after the departure of Sir Geoffrey for Bushire, I persuaded the Khan Bahadur Abdur bin Razzak to lend me a reliable guide and, accompanied by an American friend and two Askhari guards, I set out for Baraimi in a jeep. The journey occupied about five hours each way, the route taken being via Dubai and the wild, trackless country west of Yidaiyah, which consists for the most part of dunes and high ridges, undulating

481 rose-pink downs and grass-covered depressions covered with the
133 charming *zahr* plant. The going was difficult and no vehicle other than a jeep could have made it; in addition to the soft sand, there were sudden outcrops of exposed rock at the base of the sand-ridges, termed by the Arabs *shuqqa*, and on several occasions we were nearly hurled out of our seats by these obstructions.

361 After five hours of hard driving we reached the fringe of the
609 large oasis of Baraimi, and left our car by a clump of palm trees while our guide went forward to spy out the lie of the land. He returned after an interval of fifteen minutes to report that he had
• [567] identified several notorious slave dealers of the Beni Quitab tribe, but could find no signs of a market or slaves. He advised us that the inhabitants were liable to be hostile, in spite of Sir Geoffrey's recent visit, and suggested that we should return as speedily as possible.

Schultz and I had no mind to go back without seeing something of the celebrated 'town', which is in reality a collection of mud huts and tents built around the wells, although there is a small fortified building and we saw one or two shops in the open bazaar; we therefore decided to ignore Abdul's fears. No sooner had we entered the oasis than we were surrounded by a curious crowd, all *Badus*, who insisted on following us to the bazaar.

[443] The bazaar was a temporary structure opened by migrant dealers for the sale of cheap cloths and foodstuffs, and there was little of interest for us to see. We looked around for the 'dungeon' in which slaves were reputed to be detained pending their sale, but beyond the small fort and one or two other coral buildings, could see nothing which resembled a prison. Among the crowd, however, we did notice several negroes whose legs bore the marks of iron chains and the healed scars of a lash, but they were quickly hurried out of sight at our approach and we were not allowed to
609 question them. When we attempted to enter the door of the fort the crowd's attitude became threatening and for a moment I thought they would attack us.

At length the head Bedouin came forward and asked us what we wanted in Baraimi. We replied that we were friends of Sheikh Mohammed bin Ali and had come to take photographs of the oasis. This appeared to satisfy him, but it was significant that we were not invited into any of the tents or asked to partake of coffee. Plainly, our presence was not desired, and when the headman coldly enquired whether it would not be advisable if we returned

8: Coastal G-3 (1948-1956) 1950 MK1 Oman
Trucial Oman MK4
Bedouin MJ4

000 Arab World, is made ghastly by this local scarcity of water, and they can be seen watching, and sometimes licking, the gloss which is the only indication of a slight trickle from a hole in the side of a house. At other times they try to keep cool by lying at the edge of the sea, until their thirst proves too great, and they take their last drink.

TO 162 567 191 595 144

Slavery still Exists

The population is predominantly Arab, but Persians, Baluchis, Somalis and Negroes make up a considerable section of the coast-dwellers. Many of the latter are slaves, and in this polyglot society, practising polygamy and concubinage, the Arab's blood is seldom free from non-Arab strains. Although the importation of slaves from Africa and Persia is officially said to have been abolished, there is no reason to suppose that this form of trading has ceased entirely; for Britain no longer exercises her right to search vessels, and the chances of any law-breaker getting caught are very small. In addition, children are still abducted from their villages by bedouin raiders, and are sold in the market at Biraimi, the neutral region in the desert about one hundred miles to the

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P. 192 (A)

2: Codrai G-3 (1948-1950) 1950 MK1 Oman
Trucial Oman MK4
Bedouin MJ4

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south of Sharjah. Certificates stating that they have been born into slavery (a lucrative business for the signatories) are purchased by their owners and the unfortunate victims may then be legally transferred elsewhere in 'Oman, or even to Saudi Arabia, where they are said to fetch a higher price. Most of the slaves who *are* the children of slaves are well treated, and are faithful to their masters, so that their existence is often a better one than that of the poorer 'Omanis.

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Within the next few years the search for oil is going to open-up this little-known country, and 'Westernization' will suddenly appear before its people: but, with conditions as they are, it will be some time before the way is prepared for the geologists and drillers. In the meantime, their appetites wetted by concession subsidies, the rulers of the Trucial Coast are fixing the boundaries of their lands, in order to avoid battle in the event of "liquid-gold" being found. In 'Oman proper it is more difficult, and unless the Imam and those in control of the rebel tribes can be won over, they may be expected to oppose not only the oil people but the Sultan himself.

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